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Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Kevin Savetz

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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The way this week has been, I could almost write a repeat of last week's editorial! I just went back to that issue to make sure of what I had written. Spring-like weather again, and then it snows and gets brutally cold. That New England adage "If you don't like the weather, wait a minute" never seems to fail. The reverse is also true, depending on your point of view! So here it is, March 1st, and just a trace of snow on the ground. Perfect scenario for drought conditions; and this is New England, where droughts are relatively unheard of. This is an area of the country in which snow is a fact of life, all winter long. Not this year. I remember as a kid, walking to school 5 miles a day, uphill, through snow 3 or 4 feet deep! Oops, that was my parent's tall tale!

Another quick-passing week for me. Not that I'm complaining that the weekend is here again! Although I have plenty to catch up on at work, the weekend is still something I look forward to enjoy. Even if I have projects to do around the house, I need that break from the insanity of that necessary evil: the job. Maybe it's time for a vacation!

Well, like I did last week, I'm going to get the finishing touches of this week's issue done quickly; I want to get back into "Diablo"-playing. While the game is not up to the level of "Dungeon Master" of yesteryear, it does have some addictive powers! And, I'm catching up to my friend at work who is desperately stuck on one of the last levels! If I can catch or pass her, I can really rub it in!

Until next time...

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New Classic Tech Newsletter

A new online publication, the Classic Tech Eletter, recently launched. The biweekly e-mail newsletter delivers info about:

- Milestone technology and the people who created them
- Collecting and preserving vintage computers of all types

- Fellow enthusiasts and their efforts to preserve computing history
- New technology and products destined for milestone status
- Rescues of rare or historically important computers
- Auction sales of interesting computer items

http://www.classictechpub.com

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Boy, it’s been a long week. My foot is still throbbing, and my poor little toe is still swollen and nasty looking. That’s what I get for being a klutz, I guess.

On another subject, I’ve been thinking a lot about music the past few days. No, I’m not talking about creating music (either with a computer or the old fashioned way... with an actual instrument), or ripping CDs or even downloading MP3s from the internet.

I’m talking about the feelings and emotions that music can elicit from us.

I’ve never been a musician or an audiophile. I couldn’t carry a tune in a bucket, and as long as I can hear the words and tune that was good enough for me.

But while watching television the other night I had an interesting experience. Wednesday night is my favorite night because two of my favorite television shows are on back-to-back. The latest incarnation of the Star Trek saga; ENTERPRISE followed by West Wing... how can you beat that??

Anyway, I was laying back on the couch with my ailing foot propped up on a couple of pillows, listening to the theme song for ENTERPRISE. To my amazement I was caught up in the song. Now, I don’t particularly like the song, and a most assuredly don’t like it as a Star Trek theme, but for a moment something clicked. I wouldn’t classify it as a revelation or spiritually uplifting or anything, but it took me by surprise.

I have friends that are complete and total audio freaks, and I’ve never understood what the attraction was. I like all kinds of music (well, almost all kinds. I have no use for rap, and jazz is just too much work to listen to).

I appreciate Bach and Mozart as much as I do Billy Joel and Harry Chapin, but it’s only appreciation. I listen to the music and say, "Wow. THAT is talent". That evening, for the first time, I ’felt’ music. It was really kind of cool.

This is just one more instance of finding things that will surprise

you. And that, too, is kind of cool.

Now let’s get on with the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Charles Stanley posts this about new technology:

"As soon as I get interested in some technical advance and invest in it (ie, pay up), along comes another killer tech-advance that makes every previous advance useless. The story of my life.

New Scientist, 19/02/02, 16:50: ’Replacement for DVD unveiled.’

’The world’s Big nNine electronic companies have swallowed corporate pride and agreed on a single standard and name - Blue-Ray - for the next generation video and computer optical disc.’

It uses a blue laser: a single-sided 12 cm disc stores 27GB data or 13 hrs TV or 2 hrs hi-def video. Present CD/DVD tools cannot read it.

So, hold it, fellow Atari & Mac Users (PC? ugh), if you want the latest.

Bang goes my dream of getting an iMac with Superdrive."

Joshua Kaijankoski tells Charles:

"Charles, it’ll be at least 5 - 10 years before this alleged ’replacement’ is going to kick in. Look how long it took for DVD. Even if it did come out earlier than I predicted, it’s not gonna kill DVD. DVD hasn’t killed VHS yet. Go ahead and buy the iMac with superdrive. The computer itself will be obsolete by the time the new technology arrives."

Greg Goodwin adds:

"Just to note, DVD and CD are incompatible formats. DVD players that can also read audio CDs actually have two lasers. Thus, Blue-Ray devices (the name will likely change by the time it’s in consumer equipment) will likely have regular DVD lasers to provide for backwards compatibility."

Don Wolfe asks for help with grabbing stuff from the internet:

"I want to copy some Recipes off the Internet without printing the whole file. Would a screen grabber accessory be the right tool to cut one recipe out ?? If so, what is the best ACC for the Atari and where can I D/L it ??

2nd question, I have a Atari 44mg removable running off a 520ST DMA port, I want to copy some files to this computer, but my double sided external drive is acting up. So can I connect a Syquest 135mg that is using a Link 2 cable to the out port on the back of the Atari 44mg drive or will the link 2 try to convert DMA to SCSI and the 44mg has probably already done this ?? I don’t have a plain DMA cable that will connect to the Syquest 135mg which has the big SCSI port....."

Derryck Croker answers the part about the removable hard drive:

"If the out port on the 44MB drive is a DMA one (19 pin) then just plug your LinkII/Syquest in. If it's a 50 pin Centronics then you'll have to use that instead, plugging directly into the Syquest. You'll have to make sure that you remove the 44MB drive's termination if you have to go this route (and terminate the Syquest) if you go this way."

Edward Baiz tells Don:

"Nice to talk to an ex-Genie user. Yes, you could do it that way you suggested, but I would do it another way. Just save the screen as a html file. Then convert it to txt using a program that does this, cut out what you want and then print it or save it. Of course I am assuming you are doing this on an Atari, but I guess it could be done on a PC.

Hallvard Tangeraas asks about floppy drive step rates with TOS 2.06:

"When booting within TOS 2.06 isn't the step-rate set to 6ms so that High Density (HD) disk drives can be used, while retaining compatibility with DD drives?

I was under the impression that 6ms was needed for HD drives, while 3ms is used for DD drives (but also works under 6ms, albeit with an irritating grinding noise).

But... having booted my Mega STe (TOS 2.06) I ran a program called "SETSEEK.PRG" (comes as part of the "SOS 2.06" package) and there's a function which allows it to read the current setting. It showed 3ms! I even tried bypassing any ACCesories, AUTO programs etc. by holding down the <CONTROl> key while booting.
What's the deal?"

Djordje Vukovic tells Hallvard:

"In fact both the HD and the DD drives need 3ms stepping rate; when the floppy controller chip is driven by a double-frequency (16MHz) clock (as needed for HD floppies), the set-up 6ms stepping rate (actually a value in a register of the floppy controller chip which governs the counter/divider) will become 3ms in reality."

John Perez asks for help converting file formats:

"I'm looking for any ideas that people may have for converting Stereo Cad/Cyber Studio 2 files (3D2) to other formats, particularly something that 3D Studio Max can read (from the same fellow that made the Cyber Cad series!). I have been told that Rosetta doesn't work very well, and the rendering program that I have tried (Phoenix II) requires words to be typed from the manual which is in storage, and doesn't work in Gemulator anyway (sub-menus like objects or lights cannot be closed).. Any help would be appreciated."

Sascha Springer tells John:

"Quick 3D seems to support the 3D2 format but I don't know if the downloadable quick3D viewer can save:
http://www.quick3d.org/info.shtml

Avalon has free converters but there are no descriptions for them (in particular 3d2toasc.zip has none):

ftp://avalon.viewpoint.com/pub/utils/converters/ "

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony Launches New Game Discounts!
'Shadow Man: 2econd Coming'!
'Red Faction 2'! 'Superman'!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Sony Launches New Discounted Video Game Line

The U.S. video game arm of Sony Corp. unveiled a new discount game line on Tuesday, saying it would offer best-selling titles for as much as 50 percent off their current retail prices.

Sony Computer Entertainment America said it would begin offering a "Greatest Hits" series, covering both its own titles and those published by third parties, for $24.99.

Some analysts and third-party game publishers expect Sony to announce a more sweeping round of price cuts on its regular-issue games and its $299 PlayStation 2 console in May at the industry's annual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in Los Angeles.

To be eligible for the discounted pricing, games must be at least nine months old and have sold at least 400,000 copies, Sony said.

The first four titles in the series are all Sony properties: "ATV Offroad Fury," "Twisted Metal: Black," "Dark Cloud" and "Gran Turismo 3 A-Spec."

"Gran Turismo" was the sixth-best-selling game in the U.S. in 2001, according to market research firm NPD. Sony said the four titles together have sold more than 2.8 million copies.

The publisher previously launched a similar program for its PlayStation One console.

All three games currently retail for $49.99, the standard price for top games for consoles like the PS2, Nintendo Co. Ltd.’s GameCube and Microsoft Corp.’s Xbox.

The Xbox and GameCube were both launched in mid-November. The PS2 was launched in November 2000, and has sold more than 8 million units to date, making it the market leader.

Think You Can Fly? VR1 Entertainment Launches Fighter Ace III

VR1 Entertainment announced the launch of Fighter Ace III. Players engage in fast and furious World War II online aerial combat, with a choice of 80 classic warplanes, five world powers, and support for over 250 players per arena. Fighter Ace III will be released in Japanese and English in April 2002. A Free Trial Version is available for download or can be ordered on CD at http://fighterace.vr1.com/. Subscriptions to Fighter Ace III will cost $9.95 per month or $49.95 for six months of play beginning in April.

In addition to an improved terrain and graphics engine, full squadron support and a more powerful interface, Fighter Ace III provides more than 20 new aircraft types, including the Me262 jet fighter. Historical arenas like Guadalcanal, North Africa and the Battle of Britain with rolling plane sets add a significant level of intensity and realism to Fighter Ace’s unique territorial combat scenarios. Fighter Ace III also supplies you with aircraft carriers and transport ships that enhance Pacific-style island-hopping campaigns and trains and tank columns to give you plenty of targets on the ground.

Fighter Ace is VR1 Entertainment’s massively multiplayer online air combat game for the PC. It launched originally on the Microsoft Internet Gaming Zone in 1997, and has gathered a loyal following. Starting with version III, VR1 Entertainment will host and support the game and community directly.

Think you can fly?

Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. Unleashes ‘Shadow Man: 2econd Coming’ For PlayStation 2

A dark, eerie cloud of next-generation horror has risen, as Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. announced that it has shipped Shadow Man: 2econd Coming for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment. Featuring an all new game engine that was designed, developed and delivered exclusively for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, Shadow Man: 2econd Coming is the latest chapter in the Company’s successful supernatural franchise which captivated consumers worldwide with its rich story, immersive gameplay and non-stop action.

‘‘Shadow Man: 2econd Coming brings an entirely new level of horror to the PlayStation2 that will raise the hairs on gamers’ necks," said Evan Stein, Vice President of Brand. ‘‘Amid chilling new environments, scores of horrific enemies and white-knuckle action at every twist and turn, Shadow Man: 2econd Coming will deliver an unparalleled gaming experience."

Already an eagerly anticipated release, the media had the following to say about the game:

- "While not for the faint of heart, the gore content ultimately proves to be a mere footnote to a story that is compelling for its great game play and rich atmosphere. 98% Platinum Award
  -- PSE2 Magazine

- "Turn the lights off and put your kids or little brothers to bed because this one is not for the faint of heart!"
  -- ign.com

- "Shadow Man: 2econd Coming has it all; compelling story, lush graphics, and gameplay to burn, literally."
  -- Play Magazine

Developed by Acclaim Studios Teesside, Shadow Man: 2econd Coming marks the return of Mike LeRoi, an undead demon-hunter on a twisted voodoo journey through the darkest recesses of the soul. In Shadow Man: 2econd Coming, players assume the role of both LeRoi and his ‘‘Deadside" alter ego, Shadow Man, as they battle the Grigori, a group of sadistic demons that have been masquerading as humans for the past 2000 years. Players must use all of their cunning and strength to defeat the Grigori, who are trying to rescue their leader Asmodeus, from the Pit. If successful, destruction of biblical proportions will befall humanity. However, the one man that is standing between life and eternal darkness is Shadow Man.

Shadow Man: 2econd Coming offers an array of exciting features, including:

* 30+ hours of haunting gameplay;
* Epic storyline filled with thrills, chills and twists, which are unveiled to the player though both scripted in-game events and dynamic cinematics;
* Third-person horror adventure, featuring multiple routes and the combination of platform, combat, stealth and puzzle-based gameplay;
* In-game transitions between day and night, each filled with unique actions and abilities;
* Real-time weather effects, including torrential rain and icy snow;
* Rule-based reactive artificial intelligence, allowing enemies to realistically respond to actual in-game events;
* Six seamlessly connected game locations, each massive with numerous sub areas;
* Ambidextrous gameplay - twice the gore with a fully-functional weapon in each hand;
* Multiple game saving locations.

Shadow Man: 2econd Coming will in full nationwide retail distribution on March 7 at a suggested retail price of $49.99.

Sega’s JSRF -- Jet Set Radio Future for Xbox Delivers Extreme Action, Style

Sega of America announced the release of ‘‘JSRF - Jet Set Radio Future" for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft. Fusing fast action, mind-blowing cel-shaded graphics and a slammin’ soundtrack from the hip-hop maestros at Grand Royal Records and Wave Master, this sequel to

the Dreamcast-released ‘‘Jet Grind Radio" delivers extreme skating, extreme action, and of course, extreme style.

Loaded with new environments, new characters, insane new aerial maneuvers, refined artificial intelligence and retina-searing special effects, ‘‘JSRF -- Jet Set Radio Future" picks up the storyline of ‘‘Jet Grind Radio" 10 years later.

‘‘‘JSRF -- Jet Set Radio Future’ makes good on the promise of the Xbox hardware, delivering enormous interactive environments, gorgeous anime-style graphics and a truly inspired soundtrack," said Mike Fischer, vice president of entertainment marketing, Sega of America. ‘‘Blurring the lines between art, culture, music and video games, Sega will continue to bend genres and define the future of entertainment with titles like ‘JSRF - Jet Set Radio Future."’

The setting is Tokyo, 2024. Freedom of expression is a distant memory as a corrupt corporation controls the streets with its baton-brandishing militia, and it’s up to street-smart skate crews, led by a mysterious pirate radio DJ, to save the soul of the city. Armed with rocket-powered skates, wicked freestyle tricks and an arsenal of aerosol cans, players must navigate a massive interactive city, battling rival crews for new turf and ultimately squaring off against the oppressive Rokkaku Group.

Filling the airwaves of the game’s pirate radio station is a hypnotic blend of hip-hop, techno and electronic beats courtesy of some of the hottest names in music. With a soundtrack by Grand Royal Records and Sega’s Wave Master, ‘‘JSRF -- Jet Set Radio Future" features original music and rump-shaking remixes of hits from Grand Royal artists including The Latch Brothers, Russell Simins, Cibo Matto, Scapegoat Wax, Bran Van 3000, Bis, BS 2000 and The Prunes.

With intuitive pick-up-and-play controls, ‘‘JSRF -- Jet Set Radio Future" lets gamers jump right into the action, exploring an expansive cityscape teeming with rival crews, corporate goon squads, cars, busses and pedestrian traffic. Take control of street-savvy characters like the enigmatic b-boy Beat and the sexy fly girl Gum as they apply graffiti art to marked targets and perform gravity-defying tricks and combos in a battle for the freedom of self-expression.

‘‘JSRF -- Jet Set Radio Future" also features five all-new multi-player modes. Join forces with your friends, or compete against them in modes such as ‘‘City Rush," ‘‘Ball Hog," ‘‘Flag," ‘‘Graffiti Wars" and ‘‘Tag" for hours of replayability. An in-game graffiti art editor also allows aspiring artists to create their own distinctive ‘‘tags" for use within the game.

‘‘JSRF -- Jet Set Radio Future" will be available at retailers this week and carries a MSRP of $49.95. The game is rated ‘‘T" for Teen.

THQ’s ‘Red Faction’ to Be Re-Launched Under PlayStation 2 ‘Greatest Hits’ Collection

THQ Inc. announced its critically acclaimed ‘‘Red Faction" for the PlayStation¾ 2 computer entertainment system will be re-launched this spring as part of Sony Computer Entertainment America’s ‘‘Greatest Hits" collection. Beginning April 1, ‘‘Red Faction" will be available for the

manufacturers suggested retail price of $24.99 at retail outlets nationwide.

‘‘Red Faction" is one of the first third-party titles to be included in the PlayStation 2 ‘‘Greatest Hits" collection. Each game considered for the collection must have been available at retail for more than nine months and boast sales in excess of 400,000 units. ‘‘Red Faction" will also be re-released across Europe as one of only five third-party games in Sony’s PS2¾ ‘‘Platinum" collection.

THQ recently announced ‘‘Red Faction 2," a sequel that expands and builds upon the experience and technology of the original game. Developed by THQ’s studio, Volition, ‘‘Red Faction 2" is scheduled for release this winter and will be unveiled at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in May.

‘‘We are thrilled with the worldwide success of ‘Red Faction,’ as it is an original, internally developed brand, and very excited to be part of Sony’s first ‘Greatest Hits’ line-up for PlayStation 2," said Alison Locke, executive vice president, North American Publishing, THQ. ‘‘The reduced price point of $24.99 will allow more gamers to experience the innovation and excitement of ‘Red Faction’ while building anticipation for the upcoming sequel this winter."

‘‘Red Faction 2" is the sequel to one of the biggest original franchise releases of 2001. Powered by enhancements to Volition’s revolutionary Geo-Mod(TM) engine that allows players to alter and destroy the game environment in real-time, ‘‘Red Faction 2" introduces a host of new features and improvements constructed around a gripping storyline. Players will be tasked with completing multiple mission objectives with an arsenal of weapons and items at their disposal.

‘‘Red Faction 2" will also allow players to commandeer different vehicles and fight alongside elite squad members, each with their own attack specialties. Refined graphics, an auto-save function, enhanced enemy AI and dynamic environments will also be featured in ‘‘Red Faction 2." New additions to the game’s multi-player action include a four-player split screen, customizable computer opponents and new game modes.

Infogrames Takes Flight With Superman: The Man of Steel for Xbox

It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s Superman! This fall, Infogrames, Inc. brings the world’s greatest super hero -- Superman -- to the Xbox video game system from Microsoft. Based on a story derived from the most popular and recognized super hero in the world, Superman: The Man of Steel will challenge players to protect Metropolis from supervillains Brainiac 13 and Lex Luthor, and a legion of malevolent robots intent on destroying the city and taking over the world.

‘‘Utilizing the amazing power of the Xbox, Superman: The Man of Steel will finally deliver to gamers and comic book fans a Superman game that’s worthy of its namesake," said Jean-Philippe Agati, senior vice president and head of Infogrames, Inc.’s Los Angeles studio. ‘‘Featuring detailed worlds of massive scale, a host of infamous supervillains, devastating moves and powers, and a variety of dynamic play modes, Superman: The Man of Steel will thrill both new and hardcore Superman fans alike. Superman is one of the most popular and recognized characters in the world and we are creating the game that lives up to his reputation."

Superman: The Man of Steel is a single-player action game based on the DC Comics Superman universe. Aiming for complete authenticity to satisfy hardcore Superman fans, the story is being developed and written in conjunction with DC Comics. In the game, Brainiac 13 attempts to take control of the advanced technology behind the futuristic Metropolis -- technology that would enable him to destroy Metropolis and rule the world! Players assume the role of Superman, the Last Son of the Planet Krypton, and are charged with protecting the citizens caught within the ensuing chaos, finding the technology to stop the maniacal robots from taking over the city, and defeating the evil masterminds behind the diabolical plot.

The heart-pounding action takes place across vast worlds dripping with true-to-life detail. Superman must battle enemies throughout the massive urban cityscape of Metropolis, light-years from earth in the vacuum of space and in distant locales, such as the mysterious Phantom Zone and Warworld, familiar to fans of the comic series.

As Superman, players will have powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men, including super strength, heat vision, flight, ice breath, X-ray vision, telescopic vision and more. Players are treated to two unique combat experiences, with intense confrontations taking place both on the ground and in the air. From mid-flight battles with giant robots that are wreaking havoc on Metropolis buildings to engaging in hand-to-hand combat with Brainiac 13’s henchmen threatening citizens on the ground, gamers must use a variety of techniques, including punch combos and super powers, to prevail as the Man of Steel.

In addition to combat missions, gamers must surmount other adrenaline-packed challenges, including damage management, civilian rescue, disaster aversion and other gameplay modes. Brainiac 13 and his minions will do everything in their power to take back the futuristic technology from Metropolis, including damaging buildings, causing train wrecks and placing civilians in mortal danger -- it will be up to Superman alone to restore peace within the city of Metropolis, and ultimately, save the world.

Developed by Circus Freak Studios, Superman: The Man of Steel incorporates cutting-edge graphical technologies, including vertex and pixel shaders, bump mapping, environment mapping, real-time motion blurring, realistic cloth effects and spectacular particle effects. The game will feature Dolby 5.1 3D spatial sound effects and an evocative, movie-like score composed especially for the game. Superman: The Man of Steel debuts on Xbox in fall 2002.

LucasArts Chooses Xbox and PC as Platforms for Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic

LucasArts Entertainment Company LLC announced its upcoming role playing game, Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic, will debut on the Xbox video game system this fall and release on PC early 2003. Developed by BioWare Corp., the dramatic game features an original story set some 4,000 years prior to the timeframe of the Star Wars films in an era dominated by an epic conflict between the Jedi and the evil Sith.

‘‘Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic will be available on two dynamic platforms, Xbox and PC, both of which are perfectly suited for the incredibly compelling and high action role playing experience this game

will offer," said Simon Jeffery, president of LucasArts. ‘‘As always, LucasArts’ goal is to determine the best platform fit for each game. In this case, BioWare’s tremendous expertise in the PC RPG genre makes that platform an ideal showcase for the game, while an Xbox version provides a great opportunity for LucasArts to establish the first major RPG franchise on that platform."

‘‘BioWare has been fortunate to develop role playing games that have been well received over the years," said Ray Muzyka, BioWare’s joint CEO and co-executive producer of Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic. ‘‘In Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic, we’ll be able to bring BioWare’s strengths -- engaging story development, striking art and animation style, and rewarding character development -- to the Star Wars universe in a way that will deliver an amazing game play experience."

Added Greg Zeschuk, BioWare’s other joint CEO and co-executive producer, ‘‘The Xbox and PC are both fantastic game machines, and the development team is committed to pushing the boundaries of both platforms to make Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic the best role playing game possible."

EA SPORTS Ships Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 2002 for the PlayStation 2

Golf season on the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system begins with the launch of Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 2002 from EA, bringing the most realistic golf experience to fans of console golf on the PlayStation 2 console. With all-new graphics and a redesigned game engine, Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 2002 looks as lush and rich as a real golf course. The game also debuts a new real-time swing as well as an exciting, fast-paced feature allowing head-to-head competition on the links with split screen Speed Golf. EA SPORTS is in the first year of an exclusive partnership with the PGA TOUR and continues its partnership with one of the world’s best golfers and most famous sports personality, Tiger Woods.

Compete as or against Woods in Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 2002, or as one of 12 elite PGA TOUR golfers such as Notah Begay III, Vijay Singh, Colin Montgomerie and Jesper Parnevik. Play on one of four prestigious courses for PGA TOUR events, Pebble Beach Golf Links, the Tournament Players Club at Sawgrass, Princeville and Royal Birkdale Golf Club. With an all-new Total Precision Swing, players control whether they hit it straight, slice it or draw it back. Gamers also can play as one of seven new original characters choosing from one of three originally designed challenge courses, including Tiger’s ‘‘Dream 18." Tiger Woods lent his golf knowledge to EA’s game developers to help design his ideal fantasy course.

Split screen Speed Golf, a revolutionary new feature in Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 2002, brings a brand new element of golfing to next-generation console gaming. In a two-way race to the hole, golfers compete head-to-head to see who will be the first to complete 18 holes and win the most money.

CBS’ leading golf team, David Feherty and Bill Macatee, provides commentary. Nelly’s ‘‘#1 Song" is featured in the opening credits. Woods, who re-signed a new five year partnership with EA to continue the successful EA SPORTS Tiger Woods PGA TOUR Golf franchise, was motion-captured and sound recorded last year to achieve the ultimate realism in the game.

Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 2002 for the PlayStation 2 console is rated ‘‘E" (Everyone) by the ESRB.

Acclaim Sports Ships ‘All-Star Baseball 2003’ Across All Next-Generation Gaming Platforms

Delivering a mighty grand slam, Acclaim Sports, a division of Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. announced that it has simultaneously shipped its eagerly anticipated, award-winning hardball franchise, All-Star Baseball 2003, on all three next generation video game console systems -- the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, Nintendo GameCube and the Xbox video game system from Microsoft.

Featuring four-time World Series Champion Derek Jeter, All-Star Baseball 2003 features many exciting new modes of play and options that deliver unparalleled hardball realism. Available in full nationwide retail distribution on March 7, All-Star Baseball 2003 is being supported with an integrated marketing campaign, which prominently features Jeter and includes national television, print and online advertising.

‘‘All-Star Baseball 2003 steps up to the plate and delivers the best baseball experience ever brought to next-generation gaming," said Evan Stein, Vice President of Brand. ‘‘With all-new features and leading-edge technology, All-Star Baseball 2003 builds upon our successful franchise and raises the bar on hardball excellence in the industry. With strong consumer demand, high-praise from the media and a targeted marketing campaign, All-Star Baseball 2003 is poised to be a grand slam home run at retail."

All-Star Baseball 2003 has already garnered significant praise and excitement among the media, who had the following to say about the game:

* ‘‘All-Star Baseball 2003 is this year’s most exciting release..." - Game Informer
* ‘‘All-Star Baseball has an unprecedented amount of game play options to go along with its dazzling visuals. Gamers know that ASB has a heritage of quality, but this year looks to set a new benchmark." - Game Now
* ‘‘All-Star Baseball 2003 may be the prettiest baseball game on the PS2. As soon as the players run out to the field, you’ll think they’re stepping on real Zoysia." - Official PlayStation Magazine
* ‘‘All-Star Baseball 2003’s feature set takes baseball to the next level with easily the best franchise mode to ever be created for a baseball game." - IGN.com

Developed by Acclaim Studios Austin under license from Major League Baseball Properties and the Major League Baseball Players Association, Acclaim Sports’ All-Star Baseball franchise has been praised by industry press over the past two years for its breakthrough graphics and gameplay. Already highly regarded in the video game industry as the premier baseball series, All-Star Baseball 2003 builds upon that proven success and combines the perfect blend of simulation style hardball for the baseball fanatic, with the ease of use for the casual sports gamer.

All-Star Baseball 2003 offers many exciting features, including:

* All 30 Major League teams, including logos’ and uniforms;

* More than 900 players;
* Official stadiums, with active dugouts and bullpens, real time scoreboards and jumbotrons, with stadium features;
* All-new player models, featuring 3-D Cyberscan technology, giving All-Star Baseball 2003 the most realistic representation for player faces ever seen in a video game;
* Future throw technology allows players to make incredible super-smooth catches and throws like never before;
* Innovative 3D batting interface and power/contact swing selection;
* User control over check swings;
* Never-before-seen broken bats;
* Season awards like the MVP, Cy Young, Rookie Of The Year, and Gold Glove;
* Incredible gameplay depth with 10 game modes, including Exhibition, Season, Career, Franchise, Expansion, All-Star Game, Series, Manager, Home Run Derby and Batting Practice;
* Franchise Mode allows users to play and build their favorite team for up to twenty consecutive seasons;
* All-new Expansion Play allows baseball fanatics to choose a city, stadium and team logo, and add that team into the Major leagues for season play;
* All-new Expansion draft, whereby users will draft from a pool of unprotected players and build a team of free agents and minor leaguers;
* First time ever -- official in-game player trading cards, which enable users to collect, trade and unlock cheat codes throughout the game;
* More than 50 stadiums to choose from, including 8 classic and 10 expansion stadiums;
* Cooperstown Hall Of Fame team, featuring favorite sluggers from the past, such as Mike Schmidt, Reggie Jackson and Yogi Berra;
* Seven authentic stadium camera angles for television broadcast views;
* First time ever -- a 3-man broadcast booth with Bob Brenly (Manager of the Arizona Diamondbacks, the 2001 World Series Champions), Thom Brennaman and Steve Lyons.

All-Star Baseball 2003 will be in full retail distribution nationwide on March 7 at a suggested retail price of $49.99 for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, Nintendo GameCube and the Xbox video game system from Microsoft. In addition, the title will be available for the Game Boy Advance in the spring. For more information on All-Star Baseball 2003, please visit www.acclaimsports.com.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

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A Long Time Ago, in a Lab Far Away...

Steve Russell sat in a darkened movie theater recently watching the army of credits roll by after a computer-animated Hollywood blockbuster.

There was a time, he recalls thinking, when a cutting-edge computer-generated fantasy could be conceived, written, tested and packaged for distribution in a few months, just through the part-time efforts of a small group of friends.

To be precise, that time was 40 years ago this month, with the result played out on a computer screen at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Two tiny spaceships were locked in mortal combat as they swung around a simulated sun. The duel was called Spacewar.

Designed by a small group of pioneering computer programmers led by Mr. Russell, it was the world’s first video game. It was an early hint that a powerful new entertainment medium was on the horizon, one that would ultimately bond Silicon Valley to Hollywood. Perhaps most significantly, Spacewar demonstrated that sheer fun would become a driving force underlying progress in computing technology.

Over the years it played a crucial role in inspiring the creators of companies like Apple and Atari, said Henry Lowood, the curator of Stanford University’s collections on the history of science and technology. "It set off a chain of events that created companies and led to a whole idea of what Silicon Valley would be," he said.

It certainly established at least one stereotype of the high-tech age: a few frenzied geeks in their 20’s obsessively laboring after-hours in a computer lab on a creation that combined play and programming.

But the premise of Spacewar seemed to reflect the specific preoccupations of that time in the early 1960’s. It was completed the same month that John Glenn made the nation’s first manned orbital flight. And the cold war was at its most perilous stage: the Berlin Wall had just gone up, and the Cuban missile crisis would soon follow.

Now those 20-something geeks are near or past retirement age. Unlike more recent generations of computing and Internet pioneers, Spacewar’s six programmers did not find fortune from their invention. Their achievement has made them legends only within the fraternity of the world’s original computer hackers.

"The only money I made from Spacewar was as a consultant for lawsuits in the video game industry in the 1970’s," said one of the game’s creators, Alan Kotok. "I have all this fame, but it’s in a very narrow circle."

Mr. Kotok and the other members of the original team all remained part of that circle, pursuing careers in computers. Several became hardware designers, several went on to write software, one became a professor and one joined the secretive National Security Agency.

Their early creation is now a museum piece literally reflecting the software principles and programming culture of its era.

Designed to take advantage of the Digital Equipment Corporation’s brand-new PDP-1 minicomputer and the advent of a cathode- ray display screen, Spacewar was written before software was patented, and the original programmers’ instructions were shared and freely modified by a small group of software designers.

Introduced some months later at Decus, which was then a Digital Equipment Corporation users’ group, Spacewar immediately attracted a cult following. It became so addictive that at the M.I.T. laboratory where it was

designed, play was soon banned except during lunchtime and after working hours.

Spacewar was the original "twitch" game, requiring lightning reflexes. Each player used keyboard controls or a joystick to maneuver a tiny ship capable of firing a stream of torpedoes as it slid across the screen. Before long a "hyperspace" option was added so that a player could make his ship vanish and reappear at a random place on the screen, avoiding certain death.

Stewart Brand, founder of The Whole Earth Catalog, saw the game played by young hackers at Stanford's computer center in the early 1960's. "They were absolutely out of their bodies, like they were in another world," he recalled. "Once you experienced this, nothing else would do. This was beyond psychedelics. It impressed the heck out of me."

In fact, though they came to be known for their hours in front of a computer screen, the game's creators initially met through M.I.T.'s hiking club. The group was led by Mr. Russell, known as Slug, and Martin Graetz, known as Shag, both devoted science fiction fans who wondered why better science fiction movies weren't being made.

Another contributor, Peter Samson, then a 21-year old undergraduate studying engineering at M.I.T., added a crucial component called "expensive planetarium," an accurate scrolling star field that portrayed the night sky over Cambridge.

Spacewar began in January 1962 as a simple object-in-motion program, Mr. Graetz said, and by February had become a rudimentary game, including two ships, a supply of fuel and a store of torpedoes.

Both Mr. Russell and Mr. Kotok said it was never their intent to create a new digital entertainment medium. After the new Digital Equipment computer with its display was installed in late 1961, the group simply began thinking about what might be the best way to demonstrate the power of the new machine and hit on the idea of a graphical simulation of a battle between two spaceships.

Spacewar was an obvious choice, but no one in the group sensed what impact the program would have over a decade and a half of popularity.

"One of the things that drew me to the project was that here you could do interaction and painless education and demonstration, and it was engaging," said Mr. Russell, who was 24 at the time.

After agreeing to be the project's lead programmer, Mr. Russell said he procrastinated until Mr. Kotok drove to Digital Equipment and returned with a paper tape containing necessary math subroutines. Mr. Russell set to work by entering code on a Flexowriter, a typewriter device that translated commands into holes punched in paper tape.

Perhaps the most impressive feat was that Spacewar worked at all. The processor for the PDP-1 minicomputer ran at about 100,000 instructions per second, snail-like in comparison with the speed of today's fastest microprocessors, which exceed two billion instructions per second.

Moreover, the computer, which was built from discrete transistors, had to make the most of about nine kilobytes of random access memory, unfathomably little compared with the RAM of today's desktop machines, which can boast as much as one gigabyte a million kilobytes.

"Each new game tends to push the state of the art," said Richard F. Rashid, who heads research at Microsoft. "They stretch the machine as far as you can stretch it."

Moreover, the Spacewar program became an integral part of a spreading hackers' culture as it was carried on punched paper tape to the dozen or so research centers and universities that had the early PDP minicomputer.

"What I was most pleased with was that a number of people saw Spacewar and went off and said, 'I can do that' and then implemented their version on another system without looking at the source code," Mr. Russell said.

One of those inspired by the game was Nolan Bushnell, who went on to found the Atari Corporation. He was first seized by the idea of commercializing video game technology when he came across a version of Spacewar while a graduate student in engineering at the University of Utah.

In 1971 he introduced an arcade version of Spacewar called Computer Space, which was a commercial flop. Mr. Bushnell kept at it, though, and soon introduced the more successful Pong.

The game also made an impression on two other entrepreneurs-to-be, Steve Jobs (news - web sites) and Steve Wozniak, the founders of Apple Computer, who as teenagers would ride their bicycles to Stanford's artificial intelligence lab, where the game was frequently played.

But credit for the first commercial video game actually goes to Bill Pitts, a Stanford graduate who with a high school friend, Hugh Tuck, installed Galaxy Game, a coin- operated version of Spacewar, in Stanford's student union several months before Mr. Bushnell introduced Computer Space.

It became a huge hit and was played by students for more than six years, allowing Mr. Pitts to pay back the $60,000 he had invested in the project. Today his version of Spacewar is in the collection of the Computer Museum History Center in Mountain View, Calif.

For his part, Mr. Russell, now 64, is only an occasional gamer. He visits arcades to keep up with video game technology and spends a couple of hours a month playing at his own PC. But his tastes, like the times, have changed. Now it is solitaire, not spaceships, that keeps him coming back.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft Case Files Open to Media

The news media will get videotapes and transcripts of interviews with five top technology executives taken during the Microsoft antitrust case, a

federal judge has ruled.

Several media outlets, including The Associated Press, The New York Times and CNN, asked a court to release the depositions after Microsoft refused access to them.

The executives are Microsoft chief executive Steve Ballmer and senior vice president Jim Allchin, former Netscape head Jim Barksdale, Liberate Technologies chief Mitchell Kertzman and Sun Microsystems chief executive Scott McNealy.

"Microsoft fails to offer any explanation as to why provision of the transcripts and video recordings from these four depositions would be so troublesome and vexatious that the circumstances justify the denial of the Media's request," U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly wrote in a Sunday order.

McNealy's deposition has not yet taken place, but Kollar-Kotelly said the media could have the tape of his interview as well. She denied the media's request to get transcripts of other depositions.

The depositions were taken in connection with the antitrust suit pursued by nine states, led by Iowa, California and Massachusetts.

Those states want harsher penalties against the software maker than those mandated by a settlement reached by nine other states and the federal government. That settlement will be reviewed in court next week.

Kollar-Kotelly said the media will have to bear the costs of the transcripts and video, and they will be edited to remove confidential business information.

It is unclear when the media will get the videos. A standing order in the case says any depositions can be held for five days after the witness receives a copy of the interview. After that, the videotape and transcript would have to be edited to remove sensitive information and delivered to the media.

U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson, the previous judge in the case, had blocked reporters from the witness depositions until he was overruled by an appeals court. As a result, reporters attended several depositions in spring 1999, including a dramatic standoff between Microsoft lawyers and Steve Case, now chairman of AOL Time-Warner Inc.

Microsoft Pact Changes Coming

Microsoft Corp. and the government said on Wednesday they will make changes to their proposed antitrust settlement, as the judge overseeing the case laid out a schedule that would likely stretch court hearings through mid-May.

Neither side would elaborate on what the changes would be, but Microsoft spokesman Jim Desler said they came in response to public comments submitted on the settlement. In the past the company has said any changes would be minor.

A spokeswoman for the Justice Department, which will make its case for the

settlement in a separate filing, confirmed the two sides had agreed to changes.

In a landmark ruling on the case in June, a federal appeals court upheld a lower court conclusion that Microsoft had used illegal tactics to maintain its Windows monopoly but rejected splitting the company in two to prevent future violations.

Meanwhile, U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly issued an order giving Microsoft, and nine states seeking tougher sanctions against the company, 100 hours each to question a combined total of 47 witnesses in hearings on additional remedies.

Microsoft reached a deal with the Justice Department in November to settle the nearly four-year-old case by, among other things, agreeing to give computer makers more freedom to feature rival software on the machines they sell.

Nine of the 18 states in the lawsuit agreed to sign on to the deal, but nine others are pressing ahead and asking Kollar-Kotelly to impose stricter sanctions.

Those remedy hearings are to start March 11, after a separate hearing beginning March 6 on whether the settlement proposal is in the public interest.

Kollar-Kotelly on Wednesday denied a request by the states to bar more than a dozen last-minute witnesses that Microsoft plans to call to argue against the more severe sanctions sought by the non-settling states.

The states had accused Microsoft of trying to delay the proceedings and argued that the judge should not allow Microsoft to present 16 of its witnesses

In additional legal maneuvers on Wednesday, Microsoft asked Kollar-Kotelly to dismiss the harsher sanctions sought by the non-settling states, saying the states are trying to "displace" the Justice Department’s decision to settle the case.

Microsoft told the judge that the nine states still pursuing the case are overstepping their authority by proposing sanctions that go beyond the Justice Department’s settlement.

"Under well-settled legal and constitutional principles, the non-settling states are limited to seeking redress for state-specific injuries caused by Microsoft’s conduct," Microsoft said in its brief. "They cannot displace the United States in its role of establishing national competition policy."

The dissenting states, which include California, Massachusetts and Iowa, say their remedies would close a series of loopholes in the Justice Department settlement. It also would force Microsoft to sell a cheaper, stripped-down version of its monopoly Windows operating system and disclose the inner workings of Windows.

Microsoft has criticized the states’ proposal as radical and harmful to consumers.

Microsoft, U.S. Refine Antitrust Settlement

Microsoft Corp. and the U.S. Justice Department said on Thursday they had agreed to modify their antitrust settlement in response to criticism that it contained loopholes that could be exploited by the company.

The changes filed with U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly were described as "refinements," although Microsoft and the government deleted an entire provision that had been attacked for harming computer makers' efforts to protect patents on their hardware.

"The modifications announced today simply make this effective settlement even better," said Charles James, the department's antitrust chief.

But the changes drew a cool response from the nine state attorneys general who have opposed the settlement and are seeking stiffer sanctions against Microsoft for violating antitrust law.

"The revisions don't change the fundamental nature of the settlement -- nor the fundamental flaws so many have found in it," said Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller.

The department filed the changes as part of a 239-page brief defending the settlement of the nearly four-year-old case and responding to public comments submitted earlier this year.

Microsoft said the changes would "more accurately reflect the intent of the parties and address some of the misperceptions of the proposed decree."

The software giant reached the deal with the Justice Department in November after an appeals court in June upheld a lower court conclusion that Microsoft had used illegal tactics to maintain its Windows monopoly.

The settlement, among other things, would give computer makers more freedom to feature rival software on the machines they sell.

Nine of the 18 states in the lawsuit agreed to sign on to the deal, but the other nine are still pursuing the case.

Kollar-Kotelly will hold a hearing starting March 6 on whether the proposed settlement is in the public interest. Separate hearings on the demands for tougher sanctions will begin March 11 and will likely run for 6-8 weeks.

In the briefs filed late Wednesday, Microsoft agreed to drop a provision in the agreement that had been singled out for criticism by the dissenting states for requiring computer makers to license some intellectual property to Microsoft.

The states said the company had already used the settlement "to adopt significantly more onerous licensing terms and to impose them on the (computer manufacturers)."

A Justice Department official emphasized on Thursday, however, that the department concluded the provision should be dropped after reading the public comments, and not because of complaints from the states.

Microsoft also agreed to broaden some technical definitions and redefine

some terms that critics had argued could be used as loopholes to get around the restrictions in the deal.

Microsoft called that kind of criticism "specious," but it said some of the changes would make it "crystal clear" that the company would not try to wriggle out of its obligations.

Microsoft's critics and competitors in the computer industry said the changes are meaningless. Ed Black, president of the Computer & Communications Industry Association, compared the modifications to changing the tires of a car after it had been totaled in an accident.

"Have these changes made the settlement anywhere near acceptable? The answer is, 'No, absolutely not,' " Black said.

The Justice Department said a sentence had also been added to make clear Microsoft cannot manipulate the Windows desktop to discriminate against non-Microsoft products.

The dissenting states, which include California, Massachusetts and Iowa, say their additional remedies would close a series of loopholes in the Justice Department settlement. It also would force Microsoft to sell a cheaper, stripped-down version of its monopoly Windows operating system and disclose the inner workings of Windows.

Microsoft has asked Kollar-Kotelly to dismiss the request for additional sanctions, contending that the states have no right to interfere with the Justice Department's decision to forge a nationwide settlement.

In its brief filed Wednesday, the Justice Department echoed that argument, saying the judge should, "defer to the United States as representative of the public interest ..."

The Justice Department also argued that Kollar-Kotelly should endorse the settlement as soon as possible, without waiting for the dissenting states to make their case for stricter sanctions.

If the judge goes along with that suggestion, it would be a legal victory for Microsoft, according to legal analysts. That is because it would be difficult for the states to argue for stricter sanctions against Microsoft if the judge concluded that the Justice Department settlement was in the public interest.

Settling States Unsettled by Microsoft Legal Move

The Microsoft Corp. antitrust case can be a little unsettling at times -- even if you have already settled.

Having agreed to a truce in the four-year legal battle, nine of the states in the case now find themselves having to voice objections to Microsoft's latest legal maneuver, which discounts state authority in antitrust matters.

Microsoft on Wednesday asked U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly to dismiss the proposals of nine other states seeking stiffer sanctions against the company, arguing they have no right to interfere with the U.S. Justice Department's decision to forge a nationwide settlement.

But the states that have settled with Microsoft -- including New York, Illinois and Michigan -- expressed concern with that argument in a footnote to a filing backing the settlement.

"To assure no misapprehension, the settling states wish to state that they regard Microsoft's dismissal motion as without merit," the states said in their brief.

Antitrust attorneys said on Friday they are not surprised by the footnote.

"The settling states want to settle because they want to look good, but they sure don't want a precedent like what Microsoft is seeking here," said antitrust attorney Steve Axinn.

Steve Houck, an attorney who worked on the case under New York's attorney general and is now in private practice representing the dissenting states, agreed.

"I think they really have to take that position for the sake of their future enforcement activities," he said.

Legal analysts believe the Microsoft argument is a long shot, but it is potentially dangerous for all state attorneys general.

If Microsoft's argument were upheld, it would reverse a legal precedent dating back to the 1980s that gives state attorneys general the authority to pursue antitrust cases apart from the federal government.

Kollar-Kotelly will hold a hearing starting March 6 on whether the proposed settlement is in the public interest. Separate hearings on the demands for tougher sanctions will begin March 11 and will likely run for 6 to 8 weeks.

Napster Wins Two Legal Victories

A federal district court judge handed Napster a small victory Friday, calling for record labels to detail their copyright ownership of the songs the labels seek to have restricted. The judge also questioned the record companies' online distribution mechanisms.

Instead of handing the major record labels a decisive victory in the summary judgment, as expected, U.S. District Judge Marilyn Hall Patel ruled that the record labels must prove ownership of the songs in question -- an issue brought to the fore last October by Napster.

In her decision, Judge Patel said she will not allow record labels to "railroad Napster" into paying billions of dollars in statutory damages without "adequately proving ownership" of the music they claim to own.

Judge Patel did acknowledge that it is "highly unlikely" the record labels do not have ownership of the music that makes up the core of their business. However, she said she believes they have not provided adequate proof of copyright ownership thus far.

At the same time, Judge Patel noted that two of the music industry's main online music providers, MusicNet and Pressplay, may have participated in

what amount to antitrust violations by inking separate deals with the major labels.

Napster said in its October hearing that a deal with MusicNet prevented the company from inking deals with other services, such as Pressplay.

Judge Patel warned the labels that are moving forward with the Napster lawsuit that both MusicNet and PressPlay will require further scrutiny.

Michael Hoch, senior analyst for content delivery and distribution at the Aberdeen Group, told NewsFactor that he believes the record labels' strategy of splintering popular music among several download services -- which limits the songs available from any one service -- will inhibit consumer adoption.

"The danger is that if the libraries are restricted, you have to subscribe to one service to get Universal's music and another service to get Sony's music," Hoch said. "It just won't work as well. [Only] if the libraries are big enough [are] consumers going to want it."

Hoch also said he believes consumers will ultimately benefit from the current Napster legal wrangling, in that the result will pave a future path for all digital media.

"I think music is the first step toward a larger movement of [swapping] digital media over the Internet. Music is pruning out the legal and technical issues [of digital media] as we move toward more complex forms of content, such as movies," said Hoch.

Cary Sherman, senior executive vice president and general counsel of the Recording Industry Association of America, said in a statement in response to the ruling: "Napster's allegations of misuse are without merit. We look forward to providing the Court with evidence to refute Napster's claims."

Did AOL Send Bogus Bills?

America Online's sales tactics have landed it in federal court, where it stands accused of billing customers for unordered merchandise hawked in aggressive pop-up advertisements on its Internet service.

A lawsuit filed Friday in San Francisco by former subscribers alleges that the AOL Time Warner subsidiary "unlawfully charged" and withdrew funds for unordered merchandise from subscribers' credit cards, debit cards and checking accounts. The suit also claims AOL collected fees for shipping and handling costs.

AOL rebutted the charges Tuesday, saying it has a full-refund policy plus an online shopping guarantee for its members. The company noted that it regularly offers members an array of products that they can choose to purchase or decline.

"We strongly believe that the allegations are without merit, and we intend to vigorously contest the lawsuit in court," said AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham. "AOL's shopping experience is very straightforward and very practical and convenient for our members and follows standard industry practice for online retailing."

The case highlights the sales tactics of AOL, which built its business on relentless marketing. It continues to tout its merchandising prowess as a core strength after last year's $147 billion merger with Time Warner. With the company's stock price trading near a 52-week low, executives have portrayed e-commerce as a bright spot; a recent report found that AOL members spent $33 billion online in 2001.

Plaintiffs in Friday's lawsuit took issue with AOL's practice of welcoming members to the site with a pop-up ad pushing products such as Lexmark's printer/fax machine--a pitch made to some subscribers Tuesday. Members can bypass the ads by clicking a "No thanks" button or can request additional information about the product.

A group of California residents who filed the lawsuit said they received items even after clicking "No thanks." Products that appeared on their doorsteps included a desk planner, a digital CD player, a digital camera, a "Gardening for Dummies" book, "Home Depot" books and a "Torreador Bed-in-a-Bag," according to the filing.

Attorneys who filed the lawsuit are seeking approval from the court to add thousands of other individuals whom they say may have similar complaints.

Barry Himmelstein, a partner at Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein, which filed the suit, said his law firm has been contacted by more than 200 AOL subscribers with similar complaints.

"By the time I got 50 calls, I figured there was a real problem here that needed to be solved," Himmelstein said. "Most of these people tried to solve it with AOL, and apparently AOL has not made any effort to fix the problem, because it continues to happen."

Titans Clash at U.S. Senate Digital Piracy Hearing

The U.S. Senate Commerce Committee on Thursday refereed a debate that pitted content providers against consumer electronics (CE) and components manufacturers. At issue: the appropriate way to stem digital piracy.

Each side mirrored the other's claims, saying the opposition's position threatens the viability of its business.

Walt Disney Company CEO Michael Eisner told Commerce Committee Chairman Ernest Hollings (D-South Carolina) and his colleagues that if no moves are made to protect online content, the entertainment business will be finished.

Intel vice president Leslie Vadasz countered that the type of legislation proposed by Eisner and his associates would cause irreparable damage to the high-tech and consumer electronics industries by retarding innovation and investment in new technologies and by diminishing the utility of their products.

Hollings told both factions he plans to introduce legislation that favors the content providers' copyright concerns. The legislation, he said, would force CE makers to embed copyright protection technology into their merchandise.

Hollings asserted that relatively little content is available online because content owners are afraid of piracy.

He added that he will give the two parties 12 to 18 months to formulate their own compromise independent of government action. Otherwise, he said, government authorities will implement standards for compliance.

Disney’s Eisner scoffed at Vadasz’s arguments against the Hollings proposal.

"You’ll be amazed at how innovative they become," once given a concrete deadline, Eisner said.

"It’s time you accept technology and deal with the new digital world," Vadasz shot back, noting that the film industry had the same reaction to VCRs when they were first introduced in the 1970s.

Yankee Group senior analyst Mike Goodman told NewsFactor that the battle over standards stems from the fact that the two industries’ goals are at odds.

"The CE manufacturers’ primary goal is to sell equipment," Goodman said. Their financial statements boil down to how many units are sold," rather than how many units have copyright safeguards.

French Caldwell, vice president of Internet knowledge management at Gartner, said Disney is a dinosaur.

"Sony is not in as much [of] an uproar over this issue as Disney because Sony has hedged its bets," Caldwell told NewsFactor. "They have a huge stake in the media entertainment industry, but they are also invested heavily in the consumer electronics industry. They call their new Clio device a ’personal entertainment organizer,’ and the higher-end version will play MP3 files."

During the course of the hearing, Vadasz contended that the focus of the debate ought to change from content protection to consumer protection.

Ryan Jones, media and entertainment strategies analyst at the Yankee Group, told NewsFactor that the copy protections advocated by Disney and Senator Hollings would negatively impact consumers, if implemented.

"Requisite, standardized copy protection will be a new cost center for device manufacturers and technology companies, slowing price reduction and new device development," Jones said. "If copy protection slows down the rate of innovation, it could cripple the democratization of media data to multiple environments and devices -- another negative for the consumer."

"Disney is on the wrong side of consumer sentiment here, and so is Senator Hollings," Caldwell noted.

Yankee analyst Goodman said Hollings and the media companies have their heads in the sand as they attempt to maintain control over products during a time of sweeping change.

Any rules passed by the government will not have a chance against the law of supply and demand, he noted.

"Copyright protections hardware will be hacked if [someone] wants it to be hacked," Goodman said. "If you build it, it can be taken apart" in a short period of time.

He said the content providers might slow the process down or make it more

difficult, but they would not stem the tide. "It’s a lot easier to maintain a business model than [to create] a new one," he added.

SETI Control For Mac OS X Released

Developer Bob Delaney has released a SETI control developed with the REALbasic application from Real Software. The software lets you control a Darwin (Unix) version of SETI@home in Mac OS X.

This application, setiathome, runs faster than the Mac OS X screensaver version, Delaney said. The user can stay with the described full path name of setiathome. Or, via the Preferences item in the application menu of Mac OS X, the entry of the user’s full path name for the SETI application can be used.

The download includes a document "SETI control desc.rtf" that describes how to download and install the Darwin version of setiathome. SETI control is freeware.

The SETI@Home client downloads a portion of the data collected by the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) project’s radio telescopes -- most notably the gigantic Arecibo telescop! e. The client screensaver then analyzes a tiny portion of the data and searches for evidence of a signal.

By distributing the search workload to thousands of computers, SETI@Home has allowed the project to, in effect, log thousands (or more) of years of supercomputer time. Macs have contributed a considerable portion of this work time because the RISC core of the PowerPC processor is extremely efficient for this type of work.

Auction Placement Irks eBay Sellers

A recent change on eBay has stirred up a hornet’s nest of protest from sellers.

As part of a change the company made earlier this week to the way it lists auctions, the online auction giant has begun to limit the number of featured auctions it displays per page. Many sellers, who pay an extra $19.95 for the prominent display of their listing, say they are not getting what they paid for.

"There’s no reason for me to list on eBay under this format whatsoever," said Greg Aunapu, a Miami resident who sells high-end paintings and drawings on eBay. "What they are suddenly doing is turning it into classified ads instead of auctions."

The company said the change was done to benefit buyers, who can now sort listings by when an auction ends or by price, instead of having to wade through dozens of featured items.

"We believe that allowing buyers to sort listings, combined with the new treatment of featured items, provides more relevance for the buyer and should increase the quality of the exposure of featured items," eBay said in a note on its announcements board.

"We are going to evaluate these changes carefully to determine if any steps are necessary to improve the experience for buyers and to preserve or enhance the value of the Featured Plus listing to sellers," the note said. "If the buyer's or seller's activity is adversely impacted by these changes, we will take immediate action."

eBay representatives did not return calls seeking comment.

The brouhaha over featured listings is only the latest dispute between eBay and its sellers. Last month, the company saw flickers of dissent from sellers after it increased its fees days after posting record earnings.

The company saw more consequential complaints from sellers last fall. Some were upset with the company's Auction for America charity effort--which failed to reach its goal of raising $100 million in 100 days--saying eBay was using the auction to promote its proprietary payment service and was taking credit for their efforts.

Meanwhile, eBay stopped requiring sellers to use its checkout feature after many complained that the feature duplicated their own end-of-auction systems.

The San Jose, Calif.-based company also drew criticism earlier this week from privacy and auction watchdogs over its updated privacy policy and user agreement.

The change to featured listings affects how the listings are displayed within each eBay category page. Previously, buyers looking through the listings of paintings, for instance, might find dozens of featured paintings before they came across any of the general listings within the category.

Now, instead of listing all featured auctions first, the default option is to list only those featured auctions that end within the same time frame as the other auctions on the page. As a result, a buyer might only see two featured items at the top of the listings for paintings. And instead of always being on the first page or so of listings within each category, which gives them the most prominence, the featured items won't make it to the first page until the auction is about to expire.

eBay made the changes at the same time as it added a tab on its listings and a search page that allows buyers to search for items that offer its popular "Buy It Now" feature.

One of the complaints from sellers is that eBay gave them little notice of the change to featured listings. Although eBay notified members on its announcements board of the change, it did so after the fact, and some sellers feared that many were paying for featured auctions without knowing eBay had made the change.

"There's no telling how many people aren't aware that their featured items aren't even being seen now," said Trish, a seller of antique textiles who declined to give her last name.

In a note on its announcements board, eBay acknowledged that it could have done a better job notifying members of the change.

"We apologize that we did not appropriately communicate these changes to you and will redouble our efforts to ensure that proper notification is

given whenever we make changes to our site," the company said.

Notice or not, many sellers say they won’t pay to feature their items until eBay reverses its change. Many sellers are calling for refunds from the company.

Because of the change, Aunapu ended an auction for a Robert Wood painting on Tuesday hours after he listed it. Aunapu plans to list his paintings on Sothebys.com if eBay doesn’t go back to the old system.

"I don’t see how this helps eBay whatsoever," he said.

eBay Heeds Complaints From Sellers

In the face of seller protests, eBay is reversing course with a change it made to the way it displays featured auctions.

Earlier in the week, the online auction giant began limiting the number of featured auctions it displays on category pages. But after hearing from some upset sellers--who pay $19.95 for each auction that they feature--eBay will drop the limits, the company said Wednesday. The old listing format will be back in place within four days, eBay said.

"After considering the effect these changes have had on sellers who utilize featured items, and on buyers who used specific browsing tools that are no longer available, we are reinstating the previous format," the company told customers on its announcements board. "We apologize for the inconvenience that these changes have caused our members."

eBay representatives did not return calls seeking comment.

This is not the first time eBay has changed course in the wake of seller dissatisfaction. Last fall, the company introduced a new "Checkout" system intended to help streamline the closing of auctions, and required all sellers to place a Checkout button on their auctions. But when sellers complained that the system duplicated their efforts, eBay later allowed them to opt out of using it.

Similarly, the company allowed members to opt out of a new recommendation service after some sellers complained that the feature was directing their customers to competitors.

The change to the featured listings affected where certain items appeared within the company’s category listings. Previously, buyers looking through the listings of Canon digital cameras, for example, might find a page or two of featured auctions before reaching the general listings.

Now, instead of seeing all the featured items first, buyers see only those featured items that end within the same time frame as the other items on the page or that are in the same price range. Instead of always being on the first page of listings within each category, which gives them the most prominence, the featured items often won’t make it to the first page until the auction is about to expire.

Kathleen Rockney, who sells high-end used clothing on eBay, said the change made her "physically ill" when she found out about it on Monday. Rockney, who features about one item a week, had just paid to feature a

custom-made women’s ensemble that originally cost around $4,000. Although her featured auctions typically sell for good prices, the ensemble doesn’t yet have any bids and had fewer hits than she expected.

"I was upset," said the Fountain Valley, Calif., resident. "If you put my auction on page 357, no one’s going see it."

Rockney said she’s pleased that eBay has decided to go back to the old way of listing featured items. But she’ll be happier when the change is made.

"I’m going to hold my breath till I see it," she said.

UBid Unveils Fixed-Price Feature

Internet auctioneer UBid has announced the debut of a fixed-price feature called "uBuy It Now."

The new price format, which is becoming more prevalent among online retailers and auctioneers, lets UBid buyers purchase items at a fixed price without waiting for an auction to end. The feature also allows sellers to present items for sale at a specific price.

"The fixed-price feature is in keeping with the marketplace UBid has become," UBid chief marketing officer Alan Cohen told the E-Commerce Times. "We have evolved from UBid Direct and now allow buyers to immediately realize savings."

UBid now offers the fixed-price feature on its UBid Direct auctions and will introduce it on Preferred Partner and Consumer Exchange auctions next month.

The Chicago-based auction company now provides three sales models for the liquidation of end-of-life goods in such product categories as computers, housewares and collectibles.

Using the new "uBuy It Now" option, buyers can purchase a product outright at a fixed price. They also can purchase items through competitive bidding in the traditional auction format that the company has offered since its 1997 inception.

For some items, buyers can choose between purchasing the product at a specified price or submitting competing bids. In those cases, a fixed-price buy automatically ends the auction, similar to EBay’s Buy It Now feature.

Clear customer demand for a fixed-price option drove planning for "uBuy It Now," Cohen said.

In fact, in one of the first auctions presented with the new feature -- a lot of 25 cameras -- eight of 25 units were purchased at a fixed price, he added.

"’UBuy It Now’ is the next step in UBid’s evolution," acting UBid CEO Tim Takesue said. "This feature allows us to target those shoppers only interested in straight sales."

With 3 million registered users, UBid is the No. 2 online auction site,

behind EBay. But analysts said UBid's model competes more with Amazon.com and EBay-owned Half.com.

"[UBid's fixed-price feature] is another form of markdown," Forrester Research analyst James Crawford told the E-Commerce Times. "It contributes less to competition among bidders than it does to competition among other fixed-price merchants."

Unlike EBay, Crawford said, UBid is the seller of the goods on its site. EBay, on the other hand, relies on a tremendous aggregation of product and eyeballs to facilitate the sale of consumers' own goods.

"There is a ton of material in the [product liquidation] channel and a ton of demand," Crawford added.

Perhaps due to its early entry into the lucrative liquidation arena, UBid may be one of the few success stories spun by Internet startup incubator CMGI.

UBid's auctions feature more than 12,000 products daily in 16 different product categories.

"UBid is like the last man standing," Crawford said. "It has a niche in the liquidation space and is not challenged much."

But given the abundant supply and demand in the liquidation industry, Crawford added, there probably will not be a single category-killer, leaving room for a number of players to thrive.

Apple Releases Final Cut Pro 3.0.1

Apple today released an update to Final Cut Pro, the company's professional digital video editing software. The new version, 3.0.1, is ready for download from Apple's Web site.

The update corrects a problem that is manifested on some dual-processor Macs, which could unexpectedly quit when Final Cut Pro 3.0 was installed on Mac OS X.

Also, Final Cut Pro 3.0 could unexpectedly quit when opened if the Internet System Preference pane contained only partial information -- this problem will occur on either single or dual-processor Macs. The updater prevents that problem from happening (and Apple added that it doesn't add info to the Internet System Preference pane).

The 6.6MB update is now available for download. Separate downloads exist depending on which version of Final Cut Pro 3 you're trying to update: the Retail and Upgrade versions; Not For Resale (NFR) copies; Academic or Academic Lab version.

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